Statement of Purpose:

As a student heavily interested in the history of minorities in rural Ohio, I was thrilled to be invited by Ric Sheffield, Professor of Legal Studies and Sociology, as well as Director of the Knox County Black History Digital Archives, to work as his research assistant this summer.

Minorities in rural Ohio have been institutionally ignored and we need to reclaim them. Professor Sheffield's research on the lives and experiences of African Americans in rural Ohio is unique because of the personal perspective and link he has to this topic. It is refreshing to know that through his research, he has defined the emotions that I have only felt and never been able to explain. For example, his concept of being hyper-visible and invisible simultaneously as a minority among White neighbors is something I thought made me an anomaly but is actually pervasive among minorities in rural Ohio. Professor Sheffield has documented and rationalized the struggles of the Knox County Black Community in order to clarify the great deal of admiration they deserve for having the strength, humility and persistence to preserve their cultural heritage while advancing their well-being.

My passion for discovering the stories of minority communities is directly linked to my upbringing. My parents are Mexican immigrants and raised us in a predominantly Hispanic, low-income community called Barrio Logan in San Diego, California. I am the third of four daughters to be born in the United States, as well as the first in my family and one of the few from my community to attend a four-year college. My mother raised my sisters and me to believe that because we were born in the U.S., we have a better chance at changing our family's cycle of poverty. She did all she could to send us to schools away from El Barrio, closer to "good influences." I truly believed that the more I articulated, behaved and looked like the white kids at my school, the smarter and more important I would become. Being ashamed of my identity and dissociating myself from my community was exhausting. No human being should feel this way. Every time I sat in a classroom I felt intimidated because I looked different. Being poor or being a minority should not make a person feel inferior to others or hinder one's ability to thrive.

I thought my mentality would change once I came to Kenyon, but I was wrong. Walking through the science quad and attending class without seeing a single student, and much less, educator, who looked like me made me feel less capable than my peers. Students at Kenyon are starting to voice these frustrations and share their experiences as minority scholars through groups like Project for Open Voices, at occasional group lunches or directly after incidents of discrimination. If we feel this way now, how did the first African American, Hispanic, and Asian American graduates feel while at Kenyon? What discrimination did they face while they were here? Why did they come to rural Ohio and what caused them to stay? Did they feel like they “just survived” or “thrived”? The longer we wait, the less likely we are going to be able to answer these questions.
Research Methods and Qualifications:

I am motivated to work with Professor Sheffield on a project about minority communities in rural Ohio because it is clear that he has a foundation in this kind of work as the designer and director of the Knox County Black History Digital Archives. As his research assistant my primary responsibilities would include library and archival research, outreach to study participants, and media management (video and digital image editing). My work would culminate in the creation of a digital guide of resources for minority rural communities. This will serve as the foundation for an institutionalized program that offers students and faculty a research-based window into rural diversity.

I am not a stranger to the types of tasks Professor Sheffield and I plan to accomplish. As a native Spanish speaker with university level reading, writing, and translating skills, I have organized and moderated televised bilingual interviews for San Diego's ITV Channel and Center for Communications Berea in Mexico. In Costa Rica, I conducted an ethnographic study that measured the well-being of Monteverde locals before and after Ecotourism. Additionally, I have basic video production software experience using Final Cut Pro, iMovie, and Garage-band programs.

At Kenyon, I have taken Cultural Anthropology, Biological Anthropology and am currently enrolled in an upper level Linguistic Anthropology seminar. As an anthropology minor, I am aware of how ethnographic work is a staple of the discipline and note the similarities between the common methodologies of cultural anthropology and the community studies which employ oral history and field work methods.

I have been involved in many organizations dealing with topics ranging from diversity and cultural awareness to student government and mentoring programs such as REACH. As a sophomore, I led an interactive workshop titled “Redefining Chicana Sexuality through Art & Literature” for the Great Lakes College Association Students of Color Leadership Conference and was Coordinator and Co-President of the International Students at Kenyon Theme House. Last summer, I was an AmeriCorps member, working at the college prep program that helped foster and realize many of my educational pursuits: Barrio Logan College Institute. I developed and implemented interactive activities for minority first-generation students transitioning from high school to college, exposing them to the type of cultural differences that they may face. I also helped rising high school seniors search for prospective colleges, many of which fell short in terms of specialized programming for students with unconventional backgrounds. Locally, I have helped immigrant adults and their children in Mount Vernon assimilate to the social demands of the U.S. by offering language tutoring to improve performance in academic and/or workplace environments. Finally, my current Knox County Health Department internship involves community outreach to the Knox County Spanish speaking population, starting with the language translation of the annual Community Health Survey.

I am delighted by the prospect of working with Professor Sheffield on this research endeavor, knowing that my personal, academic and professional experience will facilitate the success of our project. Through discussions with my advisor, I have realized how my service to this research presents a unique opportunity for me to refine my existing qualifications and to develop a new set of scholastic credentials. It is exciting to know that our efforts will result in a transformative experience for the project.
collaborators, our local community, and national institutions eager to explore rural diversity.

**Budget Request:**

I would like to request funding for the following research expenses: a digital recorder (for conducting interviews) and software to transcribe the interviews. I estimate the costs being $80 for the recorder and $200 for the software. As this is a community based ethnographic study, transportation costs around Knox County may amount to $100. Cumulatively, our research requires $380.